

Alexandria Presbyterian Church
Shelton Avenue
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5413

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALEXANDRIA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. PA-5413

Location: The church is located on the northeast corner of Hartslog Street and Shelton Avenue, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Alexandria Presbyterian Church.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: The Alexandria Presbyterian Church served as a center of social and religious activity for members of its congregation, and the town as a whole, from the mid-nineteenth century to present. This was particularly the case prior to the early-twentieth century when the library auditorium hosted graduation exercises, plays, and other festivities.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1851.
2. Architect: William Walker, an Alexandria "house carpenter" (Harshbarger, 42).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Alexandria Presbyterian Church erected and constructed this building and has owned it since.
4. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. Originally the main facade was identical to that of the German Reformed Church: a simple three-bay scheme with a central front door and Greek Revival bell tower above the front gable-end pediment (Harshbarger, 44). A ca. 1890 photograph reveals a white picket fence that originally surrounded the church. The hexagonal bell tower had six square openings, six pilasters, a box cornice, and small lintels under a round dome.
5. Alterations and additions: The major alteration to the church occurred in 1906 when the front facade was rebuilt. The bell tower was removed and the gable front extended southward: the new facade features a double-height, inset Gothic arch with a rusticated surround that fills most of the upper facade; it contains relatively elaborate tracery and quatrefoil window openings. The boxed doorway--which is inscribed with "1850 - First Presbyterian Church - 1906"--features a shaped parapet and Gothic ornament that mimics the windows above, but is executed in moldings and recessed wood panels. There is an abbreviated tower crossing with a crenellated roof line, and contrasting white masonry sills and lintels that extend to form beltcourses and a water table; these wings perpendicular to the entry allude to a formal cruciform plan.
Originally the sanctuary windows were sixteen-over-sixteen-light, double-

hung wood sash. Four vertical pointed-arch windows were installed on the second floor, in the recessed bays of the east and west side walls; below are simpler, squarish versions. These feature wood frames set in the original opening with quatrefoil tracery and stained glass. It's likely that during this renovation, an 18'-wide apsidal "oriel" was added to the center of the north wall.

At a later date, a small, one-story cinder-block shed was inserted in the northwest corner recess that was created by the central entry enlargement. Also, the rear area of the first floor has been modified to accommodate a back door and picture window in the north wall. Another door has been added in the recess of the northeast corner of the north wall.

- B. Historical Context: In 1814 some members withdrew from the Harts Log Church congregation because the pastor, Reverend John Johnston, allegedly expressed some pro-British sentiments; in the wake of the War of 1812 this was not well received, and a large number of the Scotch-Irish congregation formed the Alexandria Presbyterian Church. In 1819 this contingent from Alexandria united with the nearby Shaver's Creek congregation, and contacted Reverend James Thompson (1792-1830). At that time there was no meeting house for the Presbyterian congregation, so they met in the shop of George Wilson (Africa, 433). The "White Meeting House" was built on the east side of Alexandria, and was used until the present building was erected in 1851. Meanwhile, in 1830 the two Presbyterian congregations were reunited.

The present Alexandria Presbyterian Church was built in 1851 at a cost of more than \$6,000, including the land. Incorporated in this structure is some of the fabric of the material from the White Meeting House (Africa, 433-34). In 1852 the Presbyterian Church was listed in the tax records as occupying three-quarters of an acre on three town lots. Because of striking similarities between this building and the German Reformed Church on Main Street, it is possible the same architect was responsible for both structures, or they were modeled after the same precedent. Both buildings were completed in 1851.

Between 1836 and 1843 the industrious congregation grew considerably, from 164 to 220 members (Africa, 434). The facade of the building was renovated in 1906 with the financial support of one of Alexandria's leading citizens, William Thompson. The project was undertaken in memory of his father, the Reverend James Thompson, who preached from 1819-30.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built at mid-century and remodeled during the early-twentieth century, the Alexandria Presbyterian Church reflects a Greek Revival form with extensive Second Gothic Revival detailing, including a prominent entry and pointed-arch stained-glass windows.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story, loosely cruciform-plan building features a front facade that is 56' x 77'; the added apse extends north 18' x 6'.
2. Foundations: The foundation of the original mass is stone, like that of the German Reformed Church in Alexandria; that of the added facade is concrete.
3. Wall construction: Brick, with the main facade laid in running-bond courses; the other three facades are constructed in five-course common bond. The buttresses flanking the entrance and the crenellated wings feature contrasting concrete beltcourses.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Chimneys: Two interior end chimneys are located on the corners of the north-wall extension.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The Tudor-arch main doorway and entrance foyer is surrounded by decorative Gothic woodwork and a shaped parapet. The front door double doors of wood are Gothic-styled, with three iron strap hinges. The surround is embellished with intricate carving.
 - b. Windows: The second-story sanctuary windows were replaced with Gothic-style pointed arches in 1906. The east and west side walls feature four each; there are two on the main, south facade. On the first level of the side facades are four smaller Gothic-arched windows. Twenty-four stained-glass windows are designed into the frame Gothic entranceway.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof is a front-facing gable covered with sheet metal. This is fronted by a shaped brick parapet with concrete coping and cruciform-shaped silhouettes.
 - b. Cornice: A simple projecting wood cornice exists along the eaves of the original block.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The original rectangular plan of the church became a modified cruciform shape after remodeling.

- D. Site: The church is on the northeast corner of Hartslog Street and Shelton Avenue, in an otherwise residential neighborhood. The parsonage was located in the fourth house east east of the church in 1875, but it had become a private dwelling by 1900.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old views (Hartslog Heritage, 44 and 78).

- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 - 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 - 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-02-10.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

- C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).